

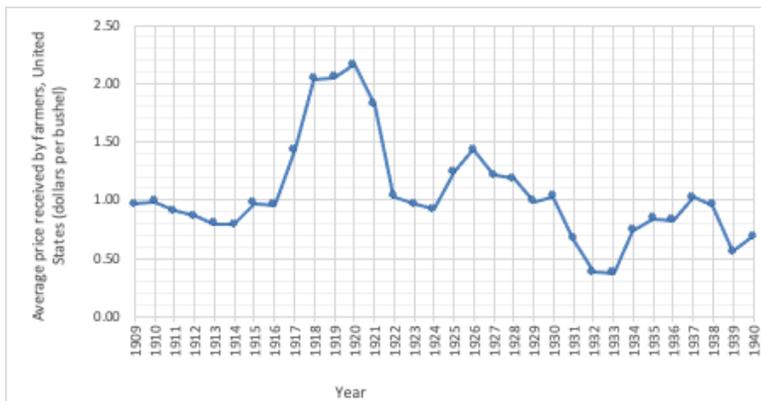
Up from the Dust Prologue & Part 1 Teacher Guide

Essential Question: What are some of the benefits of family farms? What are some of the economic and natural forces that make farming difficult?

Document Analysis

The graphs below track the average price of wheat and annual rainfall over time. Look closely at each graph, including the historical notes, and then answer the questions that follow.

Figure 1: Average Price of Wheat (1909–1940)



Source: *The Wheat Yearbook*, US Dept of Agriculture.
<https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/wheat-data/>

Some historical notes to consider:

1. Demand for wheat and government purchases occur during World War I 1917–1921.
2. The stock market crash and onset of the Great Depression occur in 1929–1939.
3. New Deal policies go into effect in 1933–1939.
4. There were years of low rainfall from 1930–1940.

Time: At least 25 minutes

Instructions

Goal/Intent: Building on their game knowledge, students develop their document-reading and writing skills as they answer the essential questions:

What are some of the benefits of family farms? What are some of the economic and natural forces that make farming difficult?

A. Document Analysis (10 min)

This document shows two graphs, one that tracks the average price of wheat and the other that tracks annual rainfall over time. Ask students to look closely at each graph, including the historical notes, and then answer the questions provided on page 2.

Help students to look beyond the obvious fluctuation of both prices and rainfall to see some additional patterns such as:

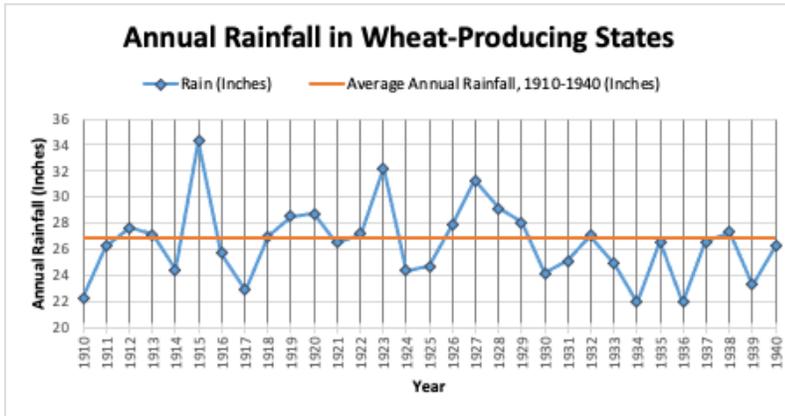
- How many years is the price of wheat at \$1 or less per bushel versus how many years over \$1 or over \$1.50?
- Similarly for rainfall, how many years is rainfall at or below the average versus how many years is it above average?

B. Discussion (15 min)

Have students share their responses, and prompt them to think about the impact of the data on the lives of farm families, such as the Dunns.

- While the price of wheat fluctuates and often moves downward, do you assume the prices for farm expenses (e.g., fuel for tractors, fertilizer, and feed for livestock) follow the same pattern or not? What happens if those expenses go up while the price of wheat goes down?

Figure 2: Annual Rainfall in Wheat-Producing States (1910–1940)



Source: *The Wheat Yearbook*, US Dept of Agriculture.

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/wheat-data/>

1. After looking closely at each graph, describe the patterns that you observe.
2. What does the data reveal about farming life? What appears to make it challenging?
3. List some possible reasons for the data changing over time.

Discussion Questions

1. List some of the economic and natural forces that made family farming difficult, and explain if farmers had any control over the impact of these forces.
2. Do you think the government should support farmers? If so, how and why? Or why not?
3. Explain some of the ways you think farming life has become easier and also more difficult since the 1930s.

- What challenges do the changing price of wheat and the varying amount of rainfall impose on farm families? What strategies can they use to plan for their futures?

Suggestions:

- Use class time to begin the **Document Analysis**; have students work in small groups to “jigsaw” the charts.
- Have students complete the analysis and respond to the questions for homework.